3.6 Citizens and the context for their use of evidence

Citizens include all of us as members of society. We use the term 'citizen' to keep the focus on the individual, and not to imply formal citizenship status as determined by a government. For example, we include undocumented individuals and we recognize that Indigenous peoples were sometimes forced to decline their Indigenous status to achieve citizenship of a country that now includes their traditional lands. Alternative terms like 'public' or 'publics' are often considered a group, not individuals. More specific terms are often sector-specific, such as consumers (consumer protection), parents (education), patients and caregivers (healthcare), residents (housing), service users (child, community and social services), taxpayers (economic development and growth), voters (citizenship), and workers (employment). Here we provide context for how citizens make decisions using questions likely to elicit factors that could support (or discourage) their use of evidence.

Questions	Prompts
What types of decisions do they make?	• Making decisions about their and their family's well-being • Spending their money on products and services • Volunteering their time and donating money to initiatives • Supporting politicians charged with addressing societal challenges • Advancing a narrow public interest, such as seeking a product recall for a product they purchased, better schooling for the type of school their children attend, and public payment for an expensive prescription drug for which a family member is now paying out-of-pocket • Advancing a broad public interest, such as improving consumer protection, education and healthcare
Where and how are decisions made?	• Can decide whether and how to take action on impulse, often as part of a learned, non-conscious process, or after reflection, as part of a deliberative, conscious process that can include finding and using evidence (1)
What factors may influence decision-making?	• Need the opportunity, motivation and capability* to make a personal decision, take local action or build a social movement • Motivation and capability can be influenced by family and friends, social-media influencers, community leaders, and others • Some citizen-specific frameworks exist, such as the 'Ottawa decision-support framework' for patients, which includes decisional needs, decisional outcomes, and decision support that meets decisional needs and achieves decisional outcomes
What 'structures' may provide a way in for evidence?*	• Regulatory frameworks that protect citizens from false or misleading advertising of products that claim to prevent, diagnose, cure, treat or mitigate • Social-accountability requirements such as citizen report cards, community monitoring, social audits, participatory budgeting, and citizen charters • Organizational and professional requirements to ensure citizens are provided with objective counsel and service in their interest and have access to an independent mechanism to address complaints (e.g., ombudsperson)
What 'processes' may provide a way in for evidence?	• Decision aids • Open-access publications • Citizen-targeted plain-language communication of evidence • Fact-checking services and misinformation trackers • Media and information (including numeric) literacy training • Trust-in-science initiatives • Citizen-science initiatives • Co-design and co-production processes • Citizen panels and other deliberative processes • Public consultation and engagement • Media, social media (including algorithms), and podcasts • Labels (called kitemarks in the UK) that signal the safety, quality or provenance of products and services (e.g., safe bicycle helmets or fair-trade coffee) • Websites that provide reviews of products and services (organized by product or service category to enable 'comparison shopping') • Websites that support 'effective altruism'** • Social movements

* Other behaviour-science frameworks also can be used, such as the attention, belief formation, choice and determination (ABCD) framework.(27)

** Websites like 80,000 hours and GiveWell are pioneers in making it easy for people to volunteer their time and donate money to initiatives that use evidence to make decisions about what they do and how they do it.

Evidence syntheses address the factors and strategies that influence the use of evidence by citizens, however, many are low quality and highly specific in their focus. Some exceptions exist, such as a medium-quality scoping review of science-communication strategies.(28) We address the available evidence about responses to misinformation in **section 4.11**.

Mistrust of elites has emerged as a significant concern recently. However, many evidence intermediaries consider it generally good that citizens are less deferential to experts and prepared to ask them difficult questions. Achieving some degree of trust in decision-makers like government policymakers isn't just about making the 'right' decisions; it's about making decisions that most citizens perceive to be right. One of the benefits of some types of evidence, like evaluations that use a randomized-controlled-trial design, is that they can be explained in ways that may make it more likely for citizens to accept the findings.

Organizational leader, Modupe Adefeso-Olateju
Non-governmental organization leader pioneering the use of citizen-led assessments and public-private partnerships to improve educational outcomes for children

It's critical that we capitalize on this once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve the evidence-support system for educational decision-makers, including government policymakers, school-board officials, school principals, teachers and parents. I wholeheartedly embrace the idea in **section 6.2** about this evidence-support system needing to be grounded in an understanding of local context (including time constraints), demand-driven, and focused on contextualizing the evidence for a given decision in an equity-sensitive way. Through the Evidence Commission, I've learned a lot about how we can complement our local educational evidence from Nigeria, including the citizen-led assessments we implement, with other forms of evidence specific to Nigeria, as well as with the best evidence regionally and globally. I see the UK's Education Endowment Foundation evidence resources and the US Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, and can immediately see the value in similar services being initiated in Nigeria and other low- and middle-income countries. Repositories like the ESSA African Education Research Database need to be strengthened and supported to become even more useful. We need to work at this.